

Session IV – Reducing the Mekong Delta’s Climate Change Vulnerability Through Regional Cooperation and Local Adaptations
11:00 AM

Mekong at Risk

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Abstract

In the ten years from 1997 to 2007, 1068 new species were described in the Mekong Region. The Mekong River is home to the greatest fish biodiversity per unit area in the world. It is also home to four of the ten giant species of the world. Livelihoods are still linked closely to ecosystem services. In the Mekong Basin, over 60 million people depend upon fisheries for their livelihoods. 70% of the fish in the Mekong are long distance migrants. The Mekong Delta produces 50% of the staple crops and 60% of the fish production of Vietnam and feeds 40 million people. Rapid economic development is changing the region and new sources of electricity are sought. Eleven new hydropower dams have been proposed for the mainstem of the Lower Mekong River. These dams will have impacts including: decreased sediment transport, changed geomorphology of the riverbed, blocked fish migration, and altered hydrology and nutrients that fuel the productivity of the delta. The Mekong Delta is predicted to be one of the three most impacted deltas by climate change in the world. The compounding effects of the mainstem dams and climate change could have significant livelihood and biodiversity consequences. These potential consequences must be weighed with the benefits of hydropower production from these dams so that a full cost and benefit analysis is done. Alternative energy sources should be explored including the development of sustainable hydropower.